

8 November 1984

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APO1>NICARAGUA/USSR>JENNINGS: Good evening. We begin again tonight with that Soviet freighter in a Nicaraguan harbor. What does it have on board? Is it or is it not carrying Soviet fighter jets. Are Moscow and Washington trying to pull a fast one on each other? Is the Reagan administration going to have a confrontation with the Soviets? ABC News has learned that Moscow and the Soviets, or Moscow and Washington, rather, are having intense discussions about the cargo. We begin in Nicaragua with ABC's Anne Garrels.

GARRELS: Today they were unloading the Soviet freighter Bakuriani, and access to the port area was restricted. Even though the U.S. still believes MiG fighters could be on board, the cargo unloaded so far appears to be small ammunition cases. There are no reports of boxes large enough to carry MiG fighters. Covered with tarpaulins and surrounded by tight security, the cargo was being taken to Managua in Soviet-made military trucks. If, indeed, the ship is carrying MiGs, U.S. diplomats say neither the Nicaraguans nor the Soviets would risk unloading them now. The Nicaraguan foreign minister says any reports of MiGs in Nicaragua are inaccurate. FATHER MIGUEL D'ESCOTO (Nicaraguan foreign affairs minister): I totally deny the charges that have been made all through the night last night over American television that there's a boat coming from the Soviet Union that was bringing MiGs to Nicaragua. That's false.

GARRELS: Yesterday, Nicaraguan anti-aircraft gunners opened up on what they claimed was a U.S. spy plane flying over the port. This morning, residents in Corinto say they heard a loud bang. Privately, U.S. officials admit this was the distinctive sonic boom of an American SR-71 spy plane. The Nicaraguans are protesting to the U.S. the second such flight in a little over a week. While the foreign minister claims the Nicaraguans have no MiGs now, he does say they will get them in the future if they need them. For months, the U.S. has charged the Nicaraguans are constructing this airfield large enough to handle advanced fighters. People in Corinto are worried the U.S. will bomb them. With U.S. Navy frigates offshore, what all this has done is heighten invasion fever. The military is on alert, and people defiantly declare, 'Nicaragua is not Grenada.' Anne Garrels, ABC News, Managua, Nicaragua.

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APO2>NICARAGUA/USSR>MCWETHY: This is John McWethy in Washington. <
>2>ABC News has learned that high-level discussions are under way between the U.S. and Soviet Union, with the U.S.

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trying to convince the Russians that if there are MiG fighters on their ship, they had better not unload them, that it would be in everyone's best interest for the aircraft, if they are there, to return to the Soviet Union on the same ship they came in. Meanwhile, U.S. intelligence sources confirm that no airplane-size crates have yet been seen coming off the Soviet freighter. At the State Department, spokesman John Hughes acknowledged that the U.S. still lacks proof that MiG fighters are indeed being delivered to Nicaragua, but he also indicated that they could easily still be on the ship, that reporters should not jump to the conclusion that the incident is necessarily over. JOHN HUGHES: You have to bear in mind the story is not played out yet.

MCWETHY: Intelligence sources indicate that if there are planes on the Soviet ship, they are probably MiG-21s. And a dozen of these planes would drastically improve Nicaragua's ability to strike its neighbors and would, therefore, pose a new threat uncomfortably close to the U.S., a threat the Reagan administration says it will not tolerate. U.S. officials deny Nicaraguan charges, however, that the U.S. plans to invade. JOHN HUGHES (State Department spokesman): There are no plans for an American invasion of Nicaragua. At the same time, we have used serious language in expressing our concern about the consequences of landing in Nicaragua high-speed combat aircraft.

MCWETHY: Unrelated to the situation in Nicaragua, but hard to ignore because of it, are two major U.S. military exercises which are getting under way today. One is called 'Quick Thrust,' and it involves the rapid call-up of some 15,000 troops, the kind of force that would be needed for an invasion. The other is a naval exercise in the Caribbean and Atlantic, which will involve some 25 ships. U.S. officials stress these military exercises have nothing to do with Nicaragua. They say, if the MiGs are delivered, the U.S. would most likely respond with air strikes, not an invasion. John McWethy, ABC News, the State Department.

< APO3>CONGRESS/>JENNINGS: We have one other late note. U.S. < >NICARAGUA>intelligence sources have told ABC News that even if there are not MiGs on the Soviet ship, there may be new anti-aircraft missiles, far better, we're told, than anything Nicaragua now has. Still on the subject of Central America, it isn't a well known fact in Washington today, but one of the former leaders of the antigovernment forces in Nicaragua has been testifying on Capitol Hill. His name is Edgar Chamorro. He has been telling the House Intelligence Committee, in secret, about the CIA's intentions, as he understood them, in Nicaragua. Before

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going to Washington, Mr. Chamorro was talking to ABC's Peter Collins in Miami.

COLLINS: This is the Nicaraguan rebel force, created and paid for by the CIA. The administration has always said the force is not intended to overthrow the Sandinista regime. PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: Let us be clear as to the American attitude toward the government of Nicaragua. We do not seek its overthrow. Our interest is to insure that it does not infect its neighbors through the export of subversion and violence.

COLLINS: But a former director of the rebel force remembers his talks with CIA agents somewhat differently.

COLLINS: Did anyone from Washington ever discuss with you overthrowing the Sandinista government? EDGAR CHAMORRO (former director, Nicaragua democratic force): I mean, that was the only purpose we always discussed with the Americans was that.

COLLINS: Chamorro recalls a secret meeting in Honduras a year ago. The CIA's top officer in charge of Central America was visiting. CHAMORRO: This top American executive who told us that it was time to have a shadow government, that we should control the territory.

COLLINS: The shadow government would be set up in a captured corner of Nicaragua. The U.S. would recognize it and would encourage other Central American governments to help the rebels. At the same time, the CIA was telling them how to sell their project to the American public. CHAMORRO: So we were coached on things to say to Congress or to the press.

COLLINS: Patrick Leahy is a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. SEN. PATRICK LEAHY (D-Vt.): The idea of setting up a provisional government, in other words, overthrowing the standing government, of course, is absolutely contrary to the presidential directive and congressional mandate.

COLLINS: Chamorro is speaking out now, he says, out of a sense that he and the rebels were cynically used by the CIA. He says, 'You don't reduce people through means or tools. You treat them as human beings with dignity.' Peter Collins, ABC News, Miami.